

EcoBags

by Lucy Gallagher, Mexiconservación

Plastic bags were introduced into circulation in the 1970s and have since become the world's favorite mean to carry purchases. Almost 30 years on, it is estimated that 500 billion to 1 trillion plastic bags are consumed and discarded annually worldwide, with devastating consequences to the environment.



Plastic bags are responsible for killing thousands of birds, turtles, whales and seals every year. Photo: Ron Prendergast

Plastic Bags and the Environment

Throughout the world, plastic bags can be seen hanging from trees, drifting across streets or floating in the ocean. They also annually fill the bellies of thousands of whales, dolphins and sea turtles - many of which die after eating discarded plastic bags they mistake for food.

Plastic bags may take up to 1,000 years to break down. Plastic never fully decomposes: it goes through a process called photodegradation and breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces, which can contaminate soil and water. The production of plastic bags required petroleum which not only is a non-renewable resource but its extraction contributes to the destruction of important habitats and ecosystems. Furthermore, the production process of plastic is polluting and energy intensive.

Paper Bags versus Plastic Bags

Although, paper bags may seem like a sound alternative to plastic bags, they carry their own set of environmental problems. Most paper is produced from tree pulp which places pressure on the Earth's forests. In comparison to plastic bags, paper bags require 40 percent more energy to produce, cause 70 percent more air pollution and release as much as 94 percent more waste into the water. In addition, the recycling of paper bags is inefficient, it takes 90 percent less energy to recycle a pound of plastic than it takes to recycle a pound of paper.

The Environmentally Friendly Choice: The Reusable Bag

Reusable bags help reduce waste and pollution from plastic and paper bags. In recent months, environmental campaigns encouraging shoppers to reuse bags have emerged around the world. In March 2007, San Francisco became the first city in America to ban the use of plastic bags, and will join a number of other cities in Europe, Australia, Africa and Asia, that already have outlawed plastic bags or have levied a tax on them.

Help reduce the number of plastic bags used in Mexico by opting for a reusable bag next time you go shopping.



Plastic bag caught on the rocks of the Mexican Caribbean coastline. Photo: Lucy Gallagher



Mexiconservación es una organización dedicada a promover, apoyar y ejecutar programas de protección ambiental, conservación y restauración de recursos naturales, gestión integrada de recursos naturales y desarrollo sostenible en México. Para más información sobre las campañas de Mexiconservación, visita: www.mexiconservacion.org.



Morral de Flamenco Mexiconservación

Our pick of Reusable Bags from Stores in Akumal



Large Canvas Tote, The Bone Zone.



Turtle Design Cotton Tote, La Boutique.



Small Natural Weave Bag, MexicArte.



Small Canvas Tote Bag, Mexico Maya.



Large Insulated Bag, El Pueblito.



Frida Design Shopping Bag, MexicArte.



Traditional Mexican Shopping Bag, Mar Caribe.

Models: Akumal Villas Staff Shot on location in Akumal.